



Looking over the Western Yar towards Yarmouth © Countryside Agency Photographer Joe Low

ONCE again, the beauty of the land and seascapes of the Isle of Wight AONB have been, over the last few months, a continuing personal source of inspiration and awe. I have particularly enjoyed the changing seasons, from a glorious summer of clear blue skies and azure seas, to a mild and colourful autumn with sunsets to match the turning colour of the falling leaves.

The year is now drawing to a close with the short days and long shadows cast across the landscape, defining its detail. The drama of the landscape is depicted by watery sunlight on the downs in the distance, or close to on the stonework of buildings with dark clouds and grey skies acting as a dramatic contrasting back-drop. The changing colour of arable fields reminds us that for some this is the start of the year. Farmer's winter crop sowings now show green shoots, a sign of future promise. Mid winter approaches with its traditional festivities; a time to reflect on the past year with loved ones, friends and family and to look forward to the forthcoming new year.

As we approach the year end, it continues to be a very busy time for the AONB Unit and I reflect on the work of the Isle of Wight AONB Partnership, and the progress that we have made. The publication of our first Annual Review detailing the work completed during 2002-03; our very successful and well supported three week Finest Landscapes Festival in September marking the 40th anniversary of the AONB designation; our Open Forum seminar and its guest speakers

discussing the importance of the character of the landscape and local distinctiveness; and the submission of the forthcoming Isle of Wight AONB Management Plan to the Countryside Agency and English Nature for their formal observations, all being particular achievements. Over the next few months we will be taking this plan, which sets out policies for the conservation and enhancement of the AONB, through the Isle of Wight Council's adoption process in preparation for its launch in April 2004. Next year also marks the 30th Anniversary of the two Heritage Coast areas within the AONB and we are currently working on a programme of celebratory events to mark the occasion, more information on this in our next edition.

In this edition we have included some regular features and we continue to explore the relationship between people and place that has given us the beauty and character of the Island's finest landscapes that we treasure and enjoy today.

John Brownscombe
AONB Officer ■

Chairman's Welcome

Welcome to our latest newsletter. It is a full year since our first edition and it has been one of marked achievement and hard work for the Isle of Wight AONB Partnership.

I hope that you were able to join in the celebrations of forty years of the AONB designation in September. We were very pleased with the walks, talks and events that took place across the Island's finest landscapes to mark the occasion. A similar event is planned next year to mark thirty years of the two areas of Heritage Coast in the AONB and we hope to better our success. Do join in with the celebrations if you can.

I hope that you enjoy the articles in this edition and I would like to wish all our readers and their families a very happy Christmas and good health and fortune for the New Year.

Tony Tutton *Chairman*
IW AONB Partnership
Steering Committee ■

Zummet vor Nippers!!!

What is Archaeology?

...'.When you think of archaeology, most people think of buried treasures or lost cities, and yes some archaeologists have discovered these things. But archaeology isn't about fame and fortune. It is a way of learning about people who lived in the past, where they lived, what they are, what they believed and the effect they had on the environment. Archaeologists study these by looking at the physical remains left behind by these people. The evidence can include artefacts (an artefact is a man-made moveable object) such as pottery, tools or jewellery which can be made from materials like clay, bone, stone, wood or metal. Fixtures, such as evidence for site occupation, standing buildings or the remains of buildings that have later been buried underground, evidence of farming, and environmental remains such as plant remains.

Archaeology only deals with the human past. We call the family of species we belong to hominids and the earliest remains of hominids are about 2 million years old. Archaeology does not deal with dinosaurs or other similar fossils. Dinosaurs became extinct about 65 million years ago. Fossils of plants and animals other than hominids are the subject of palaeontology (itself part of geology). From the beginning of the human race millions of years ago to the remains of 20th Century industry, archaeology provides us with information such as the beginning of agriculture, the origin of towns, or the discovery of metals and often these can only be understood through the examination of physical evidence...'
(an extract from the Young Archaeologists Club website) ■

The Isle of Wight branch of the Young Archaeologists Club

The Isle of Wight branch of the Young Archaeologists Club (YAC) was formed in 2001 and tries to organise practical archaeological activities for Island children aged between 9 and 16.

Members have recently taken part in the recording of a prehistoric and Roman site within the AONB which has been completely ploughed away, leaving tiny fragments of pottery as the only clue to its existence.

Anyone wanting further information about either joining the IOW YAC branch (must be aged 9 to 16) or helping out by becoming a voluntary adult helper, please send a Stamped Addressed Envelope to Rachel Salter, County Archaeology Centre, 61 Clatterford Road, Carisbrooke, Newport, Isle of Wight PO30 1NZ.

Wordsearch

See if you can find these words connected with Archaeology

| | | |
|---------------|----------|----------------|
| ARCHAEOLOGY | ARTEFACT | BARROW |
| BRONZE AGE | CASTLE | COPROLITE |
| INVESTIGATION | LAYER | MEDIEVAL |
| REMAINS | ROMAN | SAMIAN POTTERY |
| TIME TEAM | TORC | TROWEL |
| VECTIS | | |



Members of the Isle of Wight Young Archaeologists Club search for evidence of Roman remains in ploughed fields. © IWCAHES

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AONB People

John Ralph has always had a love of wildlife and the countryside, and although retired, now works virtually full-time to conserve and enhance his part of the Island's AONB.

Originally from Devon, John and his family moved to the Island in 1966 and to their current family home, in the heart of the Alverstone Valley, in 1978. As a volunteer warden for Wight Nature Fund's Alverstone Mead, he is out & about daily, ensuring that the feeders are topped up and carrying out any maintenance required. The maintenance work is varied and seasonal: from building nest-boxes, stiles and kissing gates; to water-level controls, ditch clearance, haymaking and hedge laying. However, John is keen to point out that he does not do all this on his own and pays tribute to his fellow volunteers, highlighting that it is very much a team approach utilizing everyone's different skills. As well as Wight Nature Fund, John is also a member of: the Area Environment Group for the Environment Agency; his local village Natural History Group; a pond warden; a tree warden; a bat warden and on the village hall committee. Keen to encourage local interest, he gives walks, tours and talks in and around the Nature Reserve and the

Newchurch/Alverstone area. He has a good liaison with Sandown High School, where his wife works, encouraging their students to get involved. He also arranges trips to other areas of the Island, e.g. Pelham Woods at St Lawrence (also Wight Nature Fund land) or Jersey Camp at Porchfield.

John is pleased that the Alverstone area is protected within the AONB designation, and considers that it is right to have the additional planning measures to assist in protecting the landscape and character of the area. Fiercely protective of his environment he has among his concerns for the future of the countryside the division of agricultural land into smaller plots, which then get used for activities other than farming, and often done through internet selling and has lobbied Andrew Turner, our local MP, hard, into getting this discussed and addressed in the forthcoming Planning Reform bill. He also worries about the affect on the landscape of the sale of topsoil from some of the larger fields and improper ploughing on slopes and the consequent silting of the rivers that this can lead to.

However, on the positive side, John believes that over the last ten years, public



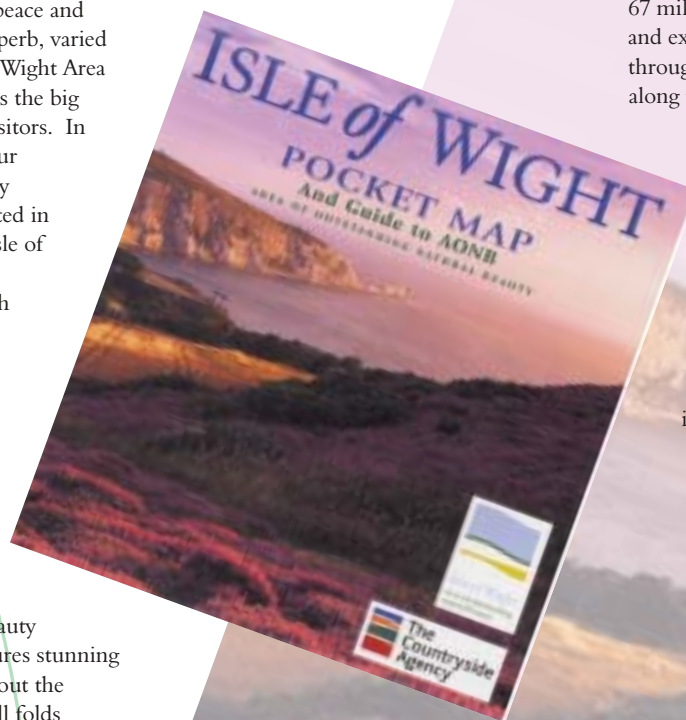
awareness and interest in countryside matters has increased and many good conservation projects have come out of this, to the benefit of both people and wildlife. He is optimistic that with the same educative process conservation issues will gather momentum resulting in less threat and more improvements to our environment.

On being asked if there was one thing or place in particular within the Island's AONB that invokes a special feeling, John reported that it was a choice between two things, for when in Alverstone Mead he sees Golden Ring Dragonflies or a Barn Owl feeding her young he feels a unique feeling of satisfaction, that in some way he has helped towards it, but that also he finds a special sense of peace, when looking at the beautiful view from Hill Heath. ■

Finest Landscapes in your pocket

The prospect of enjoying some peace and tranquillity and exploring the superb, varied landscapes offered by the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty is the big draw for many of the Island's Visitors. In recognition of this, along with our famous landmarks, our nationally important landscapes are promoted in every publication produced by Isle of Wight Tourism.

This year, in conjunction with ourselves and the Countryside Agency, IW Tourism produced the hugely successful 'Pocket Map and Guide to Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty'. In a press release earlier this year they reported that "the road map takes visitors on a journey of the Islands diverse landscape within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), while the reverse features stunning photographs and information about the Island's natural beauty – and it all folds conveniently into a pocket-sized card cover....it is also ideal for walkers when used in conjunction with IW Tourism's Coastal Path & Inland Trails Guide which follows the



67 mile coastal route along spectacular cliffs and explores eight picturesque inland trails through ancient farmland, woodland and along the downland ridges with their panoramic view of the Island"

The Pocket Map costs £2, and as well as currently being available from IW Tourism (01983 813818) or www.islandbreaks.co.uk/mailorder, leading bookstores and Island Tourist Information Centres, it is due to be sold on board Wightlink Ferries in the very near future. ■

AONB Place – The Historic Environment

Since the first prehistoric hunters followed the herds across the land we now think of as the Isle of Wight, some 425,000 years ago, human beings have been carving out the landscapes that we see around us today. Archaeology, the study of the traces of past human activity in the landscape, is helping us to build a picture of the inter-relationship between our ancestors and the landscape here on the Island.

If you stand anywhere within the Isle of Wight's AONB, you will be able to see what visitors might think of as the "natural landscape", but if you look closely you can recognise that each generation of our ancestors has left behind evidence of how they shaped the environment in which they lived.



The Longstone was once part of a Neolithic tomb built when the natural woodlands were first cleared.
© IWCAHES



The Bronze Age burial mounds known as 'five barrows' still survive in our modern Island landscape.
© IWCAHES

Contained within the AONB are the clues to the ways in which our complex landscapes have been shaped. On the Chalk downs, over 5000 years ago, our New Stone Age ancestors used flint axes to clear small areas of natural woodland to grow crops and built great chambered tombs such as the Longstone to define the limits of their territories.

As technology and the introduction of metals improved, our Bronze Age ancestors made radical changes to the appearance of the landscape. As well as defining their lands with huge ceremonial landscapes of burial mounds as can be seen on Brook Down, extensive areas of woodland were cleared for agriculture around 1500 BC and organised field systems patchworked the land. Woodland clearance and grazing created areas of downland on the chalk and heathland on

the Greensand. Soil erosion caused by prehistoric cultivation may also have shaped the landscape.

With the coming of the Romans in AD 43, the Island's landscape was organised into agricultural territories providing goods for the market economy controlled by villas, such as at Brading where the earthwork remains of a 2000 year old field system survives amongst our pasture fields.

It was during the middle ages that many of the characteristic features within our Island landscape were changed again. The formalisation of land ownership into territories, the building of manor houses, churches, farms and settlements has resulted in places we know today. Even historic ports on natural sea inlets such as Yarmouth and the failed Newtown were deliberately created in the 12th and 13th Centuries.

The Island's historic environment is recognised in the AONB as it helps us form a "sense of place" by showing us the "time-depth" of character of the landscape we live in. But the evidence of our past is fragile and once it is destroyed, the information about how our ancestors shaped their environment is lost for ever.

The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership is working towards conserving the Island's historic environment by promoting its appreciation and understanding so that future generations can also feel part of this unique Island landscape.

Ruth Waller

County Archaeologist ■



Vicky Basford undertaking HLC on the Island's landscape ©



Both sides of a medieval papal seal found by a metal detectorist © IWCAHES

New scheme for reporting archaeological finds in the Isle of Wight

Anyone who finds an archaeological object on the Isle of Wight can now get help in identifying it from Island Archaeologist Frank Basford, who has just been appointed as a part-time Finds Liaison Officer for the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

The Portable Antiquities Scheme is a national project mainly financed by the Heritage Lottery Fund for the voluntary recording of archaeological objects found by members of the public who are encouraged to contact Frank at the County Archaeology Service in Clatterford Road, Carisbrooke.

Although the Portable Antiquities Scheme is voluntary, *the Treasure Act 1997* states that finders must report objects dating to 300 years ago or more which are by weight over 10% of gold or silver. Two or more gold or silver coins, or ten or more base-metal coins also qualify as "Treasure" under the Act - as do finds of two or more Prehistoric (Iron Age or earlier) base-metal objects from the same find. ■



An aerial view of Afton Down reveals the humps and bumps which have survived from our prehistoric ancestors use of the landscape. © IWCAHES

Working to understand our historic landscapes

Historic Landscape Characterisation (HLC) is a technique used to understand historic components in the landscape such as field patterns, woodland, downland, heathland and settlement. The Isle of Wight County Archaeology Service is currently employing local archaeological consultant Vicky Basford to study these on a digital map base using GIS (Geographic Information System) software. Working in partnership with the IOW AONB Unit, this information will help us to manage the rare and unique character of our Island's landscape. ■



© IWCAHES



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ANTIQUITIES
SCHEME**

www.finds.org.uk

Folklore, customs and traditions are an important part of the character of the Isle of Wight AONB. Alan Phillips of the Isle of Wight Folklore Group, tells us more about a traditional Wight Christmas.

The Christmas Boys

One particularly strong tradition in Island villages at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th Centuries was that of the Mummers' Play, when groups of young (and sometimes not so young) men would tour round the local pubs and large houses performing, often in dialect, their local version of the play. They would be rewarded with food and drink, or gifts of money to be spent in turn at the local hostelry at the end of the evening.

There are recorded references to performances by the 'Christmas Boys' in Brighstone, Chale, Showell, Kingston, Calbourne, Freshwater, Yarmouth, Bembridge, Brading, Seaview, East Cowes and Whippingham.

The play – a version of which is recorded in Long's Dictionary of IW Dialect (1886) – featured a whole set of traditional characters such as King George, the Valiant Soldier, the French Noble Captain and the Turkish Knight (who both nevertheless spoke in IW dialect!). Much of it consisted of vaunting boasts by the lead characters, who brag of their great deeds and challenge allcomers:

*"I'll hag thee, I'll jag thee,
I'll cut thee small as a fly,
I'll zend thee to zome far land
To make a Crismus pie."*

Mock sword-fights then ensue, resulting in the deaths of first the Turkish Knight and then the Noble Captain, both slain by King George. But the corpses are 'miraculously' resuscitated by a somewhat antiquated 'Doctor' who indulges in knockabout slapstick in the process – as do they all!

Included also are other comic characters:

*"Here comes I, Gurt Head and Blunder,
If I bean't a fool edden't that a wonder,
Move all your chairs and tables and jint stools,
Vor behind me there comes a pack o' fools..."*

And even Old Father and Mother Christmas end up in a mock fight with cudgel and broom!

Costumes were very basic and appropriate to the characters represented, though they may once have been more 'ritualistic' in nature, such as those made of strips of rag or paper which effectively disguised the mummers' teams in Hampshire.



Carisbrooke High School students revive the Mummers Play in Newport during the 1990s. Courtesy of Alan Phillips

Though Island village enactments had mostly petered out by the start of the First World War, there are sporadic reports of revival of the play over the intervening decades, culminating in recent years in the energetic public performances by Carisbrooke High School students in St James' and St Thomas' Squares, Newport, during the lead up to Christmas. Girls as well as boys have participated, usually with great gusto!

A form of 'mumming' – originally a kind of dumb show – was well established by the 14th Century, but the publication of Richard Johnson's 'Famous History of the Seven Champions of Christendom' in 1596 certainly influenced the development of some of the characters of the Mummers' Plays, which were anything but silent, and which then became widespread throughout the country.

The plays were also originally part of an ancient and widespread custom of midwinter visits by supposedly 'unidentifiable beings' to bring luck and fertility; whilst the death and resurrection theme harks back to another ancient archetype wherein the death of winter and rebirth of spring are ritually re-enacted – a little bit of sympathetic magic to encourage life back to the earth during the bleak season. ■

We understand that there is a carol 'The Wold Hark' that is unique to the Isle of Wight and was sung in Churches on the Island at Christmas. If any one has a copy or any more information on this or any other Island Christmas traditions we would be grateful if you would contact us at the AONB Unit (01983) 823855 or e-mail unit@wightaonb.org.uk

Brighstone Christmas Tree Festival

**Thursday 11th – Sunday 14th
December 2003**

This is a charity event whereby local families, businesses, organisations decorate their Christmas Tree and display it in one of four venues St Mary's Anglican Church, Brighstone Methodist Church, The Wilberforce Hall or St Peter & St Paul Church, Mottistone, additionally there is a programme of cultural events, including an Icon Painter in residence, four concerts, and the lighting of a tree for the Earl Mountbatten Hospice.

Dimbola Lodge Museum

Terrace Lane, Freshwater Bay, Isle of Wight PO40 9QE
Tel: 01983 756814 Email: administrator@dimbola.co.uk
Registered Charity No: 1026339

Victorian Christmas Walk & Talk

With Dimbola Lodge Museum's Honorary Curator

Dr. Brian Hinton

Brian will be taking visitors around Freshwater Bay talking about the Victorian way of life & looking at the features of local Victorian Architecture.

Please meet in the Tearoom for 11am sharp, the talk will finish back at Dimbola Lodge Museum in time for lunch

on

**Sunday 14th December
11am - 1pm**

Tickets £2

In conjunction with the AONB



Festival of Winter Walks Sunday 28th December 2003

Join the Ramblers' Association for a choice of a 3 mile (2 hour) or 5 mile (3 hour) ramble round the Wootton area.

Meet at Brannon Way Car Park, Wootton (Grid Ref 544919)

Phone 868517, or just turn up at the meeting point.

For details of more walks and other countryside Events, pick up a Wight winter leaflet, available at all libraries or online at

www.iwight.com/walks

If you are looking for some
**extra special
quality produce**

for the Christmas and New Year
then visit the IW Farmers Market

Every Friday at St Thomas' Square,
9am until 3pm

Just published

**The definitive
guide to the
Islands Flora**



Available from most
bookshops or by post from IWNHAS
Salisbury Gardens, Ventnor
Isle of Wight PO38 5EJ

Price : £35.00

Have you missed someone off the Christmas card list?
Send an e-card – Choose a picture from the gallery on
www.wightaonb.org.uk

The IW Council Archaeology & Historic Environment Service, Wight Nature Fund, Isle of Wight Tourism, Wightlink, IW Natural History & Archaeology Society, IW Folklore Group, County Archivist, Julia Margaret Cameron Trust, Ramblers Association, Farmers Market, IW Council Countryside Section and Island 2000 Trust are members of the IW AONB Partnership and we would like to thank them for their contribution to our work.

Enjoying the AONB



East Yar Valley, Alverstone © Countryside Agency Photographer Joe Low

To many, when thinking of the Isle of Wight AONB, visions of the often breathtaking scenery offered by the South West Coast of the Island or the tranquil estuaries at Newtown or Yarmouth, spring to mind. However, nestling at the southern base of the Brading/Ashey Chalk downland ridge, following a section of the Eastern Yar, lies a small pocket of the AONB that often goes unsung. This is an area that typifies the confusion of both natural and social influences on the landscape. There is a lot of work being done by many organisations to conserve and enhance the traditional

character of landscape – a mix of wetland meadows, woodland, wildlife meadows and pasture land used for grazing by farm livestock.

A lot of this area is also protected as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and there is a wealth of wildlife to look out for throughout the year from: a variety of ferns, sedges and other wetland flora to Climbing Corydalis, Oak, Hazel and other woodland flowers and trees on the higher ground; Dragonflies to Wood Crickets and Butterflies; Kingfishers, Herons, Barn Owls and Woodpeckers to Snipe and Teal; and

Dormice, Water Voles Red Squirrels to Badgers.

This is an ideal area for all the family to enjoy and explore, choosing your own pace and distance as although there is already an extensive network of public footpaths and bridleways and part of the new Newport to Sandown Cycletrack, there are also additional paths and set walks to follow being offered by: Island 2000 Trust's, new Wetland Walk or their Yar River Trail; the Wight Nature Fund Reserves at Alverstone Mead or Youngwoods Copse; and the New Newchurch Parish Trail. ■



AONB Unit Team

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The Isle of Wight AONB Partnership is jointly supported by the Countryside Agency and the Isle of Wight Council

